Patrol duty along this stretch was worse than anywhere I'd been. Beyond the coastal plain it was hilly, with patches of fern pine and brush and open fields or grassy slopes. Ambush country. Our patrols usually stopped and interrogated all civilians out in the countryside, especially males of army age. These we stripped and searched. Underwear was a telltale mark of a guerilla. It was army issue. My boys always hated this task for they were very lousy. We always doused them with DDT powder when we hauled them in to regiment intelligence, and they seemed eager to get it.

They instituted a system of aerial reconnaissance and I hated it even more. We were moving via the leapfrog method. One battalion would push forward, secure the ground and the next day another battalion would pass through them and seize more ground. It was the forward battalion's duty to provide reconnaissance prior to moving. Every other morning at about a half hour past dawn, I was picked up by a Piper Cub plane and we scoured the area of our advance. I drew terrain sketches, spotted all the enemy possible and gathered all other pertinent information.

One fly in the ointment was that my pilot was the craziest one bastard I've ever seen. His name was Captain Dyer. He had

a . 38 Magnum pistol and was always peeling off and firing at any suspected enemy. This caused them to fire in return and that's not what I was out there for. He had an inch-thick steel seat under him and I had none. When I reminded him of this he said, "Oh, yeah, before I got this seat made I always flew like this--" and he cupped one hand over his privates and kept the other on the stick.

One day he brought along a case of empty beer bottles, which he dumped out over an encampment. Bottles make bomb-like noises when falling and he chuckled, "I'll have those bastards hunting dud bombs all day!" Sometimes he even threw out smoke grenades.

My chief interpreter and the boss of my Koreans was the cruelest man I've ever seen. He had been an officer with the Japanese and was a real survivor. When we took prisoners, he would interrogate them. He started out by kicking shins to a bloody pulp. Then he called them to his office, if he had one set up in an abandoned building, where he sat tapping two sharp pencils on a desk. Let a prisoner answer unsuitably and he got a jab in the face with a sharp pencil. He had worse devices. I couldn't stand it and removed him from this duty, which irked him greatly. He said to me, "By and by, they look down a rifle barrel at you and

we see who feel sorry for them." This seemed to be a favorite refrain around P. O. W.'s.

As time went by I became one of the boys again. I had almost forgotten what it was like to come in from patrol, have someone light a cigarette for you, tell you they had some hot chow or just look at you with some respect. What irritated me most, when no one knew me, was someone was always trying to impress me with their combat experience, like I was a green boot or something. One little shave-tail once said to me, "Well, Skipper, how does it feel to be in combat?"

I said, "Oh, I guess I'll make out."

"Well," he said, "just stick around and you'll get used to it."

I blew my stack. "Listen, you shithead, I've got more time in combat than you have in the Marine Corps. From now on you just stay away from me!" Later on, I was asked to submit a name for a regimental job and I submitted his and got rid of him.

We were living right out in the bare open hills. Sometimes, maybe once in a lifetime, a guy can buddy up with a man that he always feels comfortable with, and they never seem to irritate, get tired of or bored with each other. Such a man was First

Lieutenant George Zellich. We hit it off from the start. George was a coach and teacher from Eugene, Oregon. I guess he was quite a college football player in his day. He was a real regular guy and we helped each other a lot. We usually built some sort of shelter. You should have seen some of them. Hogs and dogs were insulted when invited in. But they kept out some of the weather, or at least gave that impression.

George could have gone home anytime he asked--he had a separated shoulder from football. Sometimes in cold weather his arm was paralyzed until almost noon. I'd help him get dressed and get his fur parka on and ask, "George, why in hell don't you turn in and get out of here?"

"No, by god," he would answer, "my men are over here and I'm damned if I'll leave."

We had a big sergeant whom we called "Humphrey" and who was what was commonly known as a chow hound. Also, he was a pack rat. He collected stones for his mother and I had to make him unload his pack several times. He was a horse of a man, though. Whenever you saw him, he always had a string of eggs (the Koreans strung their eggs in a woven net container), a live chicken, vegetables, fruit and the like.

One day he had a live piglet stuffed in his jacket and was eagerly awaiting a bivouac area so he could roast it. We came to an isolated mud shack and Humphrey heard something inside. He kicked open the door, ready for action. There was a dead North Korean and an old sow and her piglets. They had eaten the mid section of the corpse. I guess Humphrey lost his appetite. He took the little pig from his jacket, set it on the ground and said, "Shoo, you little son of a bitch, get the hell out of here."

I remember those guys with a tight throat, from the regiment C.O., Lieutenant Colonel Raymond Murray, on down. Colonel Taplett reminded me a lot of Gregory Peck, the tall, dark, handsome bit. He always had a ready smile and a joke for a job well done, but he had little patience with those who goofed off. For them he had a few well-chosen words and eyes that looked like a bolt of electricity could jump out and zap you at any moment. He had "leader" stamped all over him and automatically inspired confidence in his decisions. He never asked a man to do something that he wouldn't do himself, and the men always came first with him.

Major John Canney, our executive officer, was a damn fine marine, an ex-pilot. He would show me his pictures of his pretty wife and three husky little boys.

My company radio operator, P.F.C. Louis Swenson, was a big blonde kid we called "Swede." He put me in mind of one of my basketball teammates in high school. My property sergeant, Harry Clay, was a veteran of eighteen years and every inch a marine.

A good friend of mine was Captain Harold Schrier, commanding officer of Company I. Captain Schrier had helped plant the first flag on Mt. Suri Bachi on Iwo Jima, before the one was erected for the famous photograph and the sculpture in Arlington Cemetery.

I exchanged home addresses with Second Lieutenant Dana Cashion, a rifle platoon leader of Company G. He was prowling around North Korea when the U.N. forces were still in Pusan. Blowing up tunnels and stuff like that. He made the cover of Life Magazine. Another G Company platoon leader, Second Lieutenant John "Blackie" Cahill, was a damn good man to have on your side, too. His platoon had seen the first combat action of the Marines in Korea, back in July down at Pusan. The temperature had been over a hundred that day. One of our doctors, Dr. Moon, was from Bluffton, Indiana, near my hometown. He and Dr. Murphy were super. The men in the whole outfit were the cream of the country.

On the other hand, we could really screw up sometimes. In one operation we took a big pile of grenades, ammo and explosives from prisoners. We piled them on the far side of a railroad embankment and Colonel Taplett told me to destroy them. I took two men, some TNT blocks, wire, batteries and detonating caps and set out to do the job. We placed the TNT under the pile, ran the wires to the other side of the embankment and touched them to the batteries. Talk about the Fourth of July! The pile went up in all directions. Grenades exploded all around us. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Then we had the touchy job of reassembling the damn stuff, because some things didn't explode. This time we piled the whole cache on a stack of railroad ties and set them afire. That did the job and taught us a lesson.

I remember when I saw my first Chinese soldier. It was a rather pleasant, sunny fall afternoon after a cold snap of several days. I noticed about a dozen of my men grouped around a campfire in a clearing with thickets all around. Perfect spot for an ambush, I thought. I intended to admonish them for leaving themselves in such a vulnerable position. As I approached, I saw a strange figure in a white quilted uniform, the center of attention. Lo and behold, it was a fat, little cherub-faced Chinese. He was happily eating a can of hot corned-beef hash and alternating bites with

hungry drags on an American cigarette. When he saw me he arose and bowed to me several times.

"Where in hell did you get him?" I asked.

"He just walked out of the woods," someone said.

I moved everyone out of the clearing. "I've been telling you yahoos for weeks not to bunch up in the open," I said. "There could be a dozen of 'em out there and you're gonna get your ass shot off."

Then I sent a man to get my Korean interpreter from the Wharang Platoon. He couldn't understand Chinese. We had one Wharang who had been born and raised up in this area before he migrated south. We got him there. I could see right away that they could converse. "Who is he?" I asked.

"He say he is cook of (such and such outfit of the Red Chinese Army).

"Ask him why is he here."

The Chinese cook got a funny scowl on his face when he answered my interpreter.

The interpreter turned to me and said "He say everybody alla time bitch about his cooking."

We all went into hysterics. Everyone could relate to that. "He say they threaten him," continued the Wharang, "so he come to cook for Yanks."

I took the gent to Colonel Taplett and he ordered a jeep to take him to regimental intelligence. I handed him a pack of Camels and he bowed several times as the jeep pulled away.

Somewhere we came upon a charcoal factory in a small town. This was a bonanza. We all had our charcoal heaters made of a tin can slipped inside a larger one. This made a good heater and warmed a covered foxhole fine. We also had cook stoves for the C-rations made from cans. We all pilfered as much charcoal from the factory as we could store for future use.

My H.Q. was set up close to the factory, so I commandeered what was apparently an office and set my C.P. up in it. In one corner was a stack of new woven rattan or rope bags for charcoal. A soft place for my sleeping bag. That's where I spread it and bunked down for the night. Not a bad setup, I thought, inside and a soft bed, the best you can ask for in a combat operation.

I hadn't spent a more miserable night since Bougainville. I itched, burned and stung all night and couldn't figure out what in hell was the matter with me. In the morning I happened to lift one of the bags and there was a solid layer of well-fed fleas. It was the same between every layer. I hoped they appreciated the catering service. I was real careful where I put my sleeping bag after that.

We bivouaced at another small town that had a factory of some sort on the outskirts. The building was huge and all one room, like an auditorium. The weather had reached that point where you'd freeze if you stood still and sweat if you exercised. Just plain miserable.

Colonel Taplett ordered me to set up my H.Q. in the factory. In the middle of this huge room stood a furnace or oven built from four thicknesses of clay brick. It was about eight feet long, four feet wide and four feet high. It would take about a six-foot log. We got the log and fired it up. It was then that I began to appreciate the oriental ingenuity, especially since they had so little to do with. There wasn't a spot in that building that wasn't as comfortable as the living room floor at home. Long after the fire burned out, the bricks gave off heat enough to keep the place packed with men and

their gear.

I think the H. Q. commandant job is the worst in the Marine Corps. There were so many details to take care of when we had to move, and we moved all the time, it seemed. When headquarters was fouled up everyone was fouled up. To keep it all coordinated, I often jotted things down in my pocket notebook--

Between H and I Companies
Follow H Company
(Rear all other vehicles)

C. O. and Ex.
T. C. S. Jeep

S-2 S-3
Supply Arms
Air Jeep
Artillery Jeep
Tank Jeep
N. F. F. Jeep

S-1 S-4
Mess Center
Runners
SW. Board

Supply and Mess

There was plenty to do when we bivouacked--

24 hr. continued security
Submit sketch of C. P. security
Include crew served wpns. to Ex. O.
Up to date roster of C. P.
Assign battle stations for all hands
Outer perimeter -- interior of security
13 men mobile reserve
If needed see S-3 for additional security
Enforce camouflage and blackout
Preparation and issue of assistant C. O.
Flash warning system
Sign and countersign

Vehicles and installations 25 yd. minimum and dug in
Dismount and parking area
Sanitation and police
50% mess at one time
Rep. clothing and equipt.
Uniform regulations

Besides catching patrol after patrol with my Wharangs, I felt I should be with them when they were used to plug holes in the line and crap details like that. Although I had a Second Lieutenant with them when I was performing H.Q. duties, I was responsible for them and I felt I should be there as much as possible.

One good thing about getting up into the hills was the terrain was too rough for the Piper Cub, and I didn't have to scout with that crazy Captain Dyer. Then it was a helicopter. It was my habit to go to the pickup area, heat a can of C-rations in my helmet and wait for the chopper. That dude seemed to have an uncanny knack of landing just when I was ready to eat, and his rotor blades would stir up dust and crap, liberally covering my breakfast. Oh, well, at least he was a sane, normal pilot, although I never felt comfortable up there in that glass bubble of a thing.

We came to a big mountain.cave stuffed with C-2 explosives. Regimental H.Q. ordered it blown. We were bivouacked miles from the mountain in an apple orchard and were eating apples when the

mountain blew. It went up in a mushroom cloud and blew back our pant legs and coattails, so great was the repercussion. Then it rained rocks like dump trucks. Colonel Taplett said, "Maybe those goddamn Chinese up there will think we exploded an A-Bomb and go home."

Again, I was running onto all kinds of things I wished I could take home to Carm. Bronze utensils such as teapots, bowls, etc., with splendid carvings on them, masterpieces. I did pick up a whole bunch of little oriental spoons for Lyn and put them in the lining of my sleeping bag. Also, I got a beautiful oriental sword along the way. Hoping to get that home to Wade, I wired it underneath a quartermaster trailer. Now if I don't lose track of that trailer --

I was growing hard again, mentally and physically. It had been difficult, now that I was older, harder to shed the inhibitions of civilization and obtain that sense of exhilaration that I had felt as a young man in the Pacific. Sometimes when I would get kind of reckless and gung ho, I would sit down, smoke a cigarette and remind myself that I had a wife and two kids at home. Then I wouldn't go charging into things so fast. We would watch the planes strafe or bomb targets. There would be some who would mow the

grass and some who would pull out way above the target. When the latter happened, we always said, "Now there's a married pilot." Well, I was a married infantry officer.

West of Pukchong, Korea
Nov. 9, 1950

My Darling Carm, Lyn and Wade,

This is the first time I've written to you in the daytime since I don't know when. I'm in my pup tent lying down and writing on two C-ration cartons. Very uncomfortable but it's rather warm today. I have on my longjohns, a wool sweater, my jacket and a fur vest. In the evenings I also put on my fur parka.

We're set up in an apple orchard. Out the front I can see terraced fields galore. You should see these terrace jobs. They're remarkable. All the hills are so. Made into big wide steps with a rim around each step. They all hold water and that's where they grow rice.

Your letter last night sure touched me--Lyn's tooth, her starting to school and Wade romping with the kids. I sure hate to miss all that, honey. I suppose that's selfish, as someone has to do this stuff, too. At least I can carry myself with pride and my kids can say their daddy did his duty, damn it.

We're still pushing north. We've taken some Chinks, but I don't think anything real great will develop from them, unless we want it to. If they come in, I'll get out if and when the Good Lord wills it so. I went to services the other day. You should have seen it. Guys sitting on a rice terrace with their rifles, taking communion.

Today we had some hot chow, tomato soup. Boy, it was good. One of the boys was back to the rear areas and brought me two small boxes of shredded wheat and a

can of condensed milk. Boy, did I go for that and I thought of you and your shredded wheat at the breakfast table with every bite.

Lyn sure wasn't operating for peanuts when she was dickering with the fairies over her tooth, was she? Well, a tooth is worth more than five or ten cents. She just had a sense of value and wanted to drive a hard bargain. You' ll have to watch Wade if he gets too rough. I don't think he has a vicious tendency in him but I don't care for him to develop any. Still, he's got to be taught to look out for himself, and he's rather inclined to do so.

I took a bath this morning. I heated a helmet full of water, used a pair of drawers as a wash cloth and really feel pretty clean. After that I washed three pairs of socks. I want a good facial as soon as I see you. My face is chapped and cracked and full of dirt. Sometimes I don't get to wash for quite some time. Cold water doesn't do so well.

Well, darling, until next time I'll cease writing but not thinking and dreaming of you. I love you.

Love as ever,
Ron

Hello Lyn and Wade,

I hear you are going to school. I can hardly believe my little girl is that big. Do you like to ride the bus? Is Wade being a pretty good boy? You guys should see the trains over here. They aren't much bigger than our car and look funny. Bye for now.

Daddy

The 175th Marine Corps birthday came, November 10, but there wasn't any cake in our outfit. I had a small can of cherries and a can of cold, greasy beef stew. We were on a long march, up

to Chinhung-ni, into the mountains. The roughest country I'd ever seen. We couldn't find a level spot to dig in when we finally stopped. We just bored holes into the side of a mountain. Step outside your foxhole and it was almost straight down. On top of that, winter hit us with a terrific blast. I washed my hands, face and feet in a little river near the camp and, boy, was it cold! Then I wrote Carm a letter, squeezed up in a corner of the blackout tent, with poor lighting and guys answering phones, going over reports and maps and occasionally stepping on me. Happy birthday, U. S. M. C.! I would have preferred to celebrate by pushing on to the Yalu.

Instead, we remained in the Chinhung-ni area for almost two weeks. We were about twenty miles south of the Chosin. The Seventh Marines were moving into Koto-ri, eleven miles up the road. Our Second Battalion still held the Sinhung Valley, while units from the Seventh Army Division were moving over from our right flank to relieve them. The First Marines soon would move to Hamhung, as the Army relieved them in the Wonsan area. They were fighting the last skirmishes at Majon-ni, securing that essential road junction. Our Division C. P. was now at Hangnam, the seaport near Hamhung, providing a direct M. S. R. from the sea. The division was spread over 160 miles. The Eighth Army was camped along the Chonghon River, out west, resting and regrouping for a big

offensive later in the month. Their eastern flank was about eighty miles southwest of us, across the treacherous mountains.

The delay was necessary, though it seemed unnecessary from our point of view. We blamed it on the Army always bogging down. Maybe so, but also it was the thoroughness of the First Marine Division brass. Major General Oliver Smith, our Division commander, was perturbed by the intelligence reports of a massing of Chinese Communist Forces on both sides of the Yalu. The prevailing view from the Pentagon down was that the Chinese merely intended to protect the border and the North Korean power plants on the Chosin and Fusen, which supplied electricity to Manchuria. Not General Smith and his staff. They prepared for the worst. The Seventh Marines would occupy Hagaru, on the southern shore of the Chosin, on November 15. Then we would wait while Hagaru was built into a forward base. Engineers worked feverishly night and day reinforcing the mountain road to Hagaru for heavy armor and trucks, bulldozing an airstrip at Hagaru, setting up a medical supply dump there. Waiting for further Army reinforcements to free up Colonel Puller's First Marines, so they could take positions along the road behind us. We were chomping at the bit--

"Hell, we'd be on the Yalu now, but the goddamn X Corps can't keep up."

"We could reach the Yalu in two days, if the Chinks stay out."

"Shit, the Chinks are smart enough to leave us alone. The Seventh clobbered hell out of them, and that's the last we've seen of them, except patrols and deserters."

An old friend from Samoa days joined us at Chinhung-ni, Harold "Windy" Swain, now a major. He took over the S-4 spot, fourth in command of the battalion. He was the same old Windy, full of down-home talk, with his usual drawl. We were given to reminiscing about the Pacific and the old Third Marines, much to the amusement of the rest of the guys.

"Windy, this outfit moves fast, by god. If you cain't keep up, we'll just have to sacrament you!"

I woke up November 13 to find my canteen frozen solid. A fierce wind blew all day. I never saw so much crap flying through the air. When you weren't on duty, you were in the sack, trying to stay warm. Zellich and I dug a hole and put our tent over it. That

broke the wind somewhat but the crap blew in, anyway. Some PX supplies came in and I got cigarettes, stationery, razor blades and a candy bar. That night it snowed.

A day or so later, Brigadier General Edward Craig, the assistant Division commander, visited us by helicopter. I was the colonel's host and the general's guide. We welcomed him with an honor guard of twelve men, commanded by Zellich. General Craig had the most phenomenal memory I've ever seen. I didn't remember him, but he had commanded the Ninth Marines on Boogie. He alighted from the chopper, saluted me, shook hands and said, "Didn't I see you on Bougainville in 1943? You were a second lieutenant." He recognized several people like that that day.

It was something like eight below and a terrific wind was blowing again. The pup tents were just beating up and down. I accompanied the general while he inspected the honor guard. He stopped in front of Zellich and said, "Lieutenant, you have a fine body of men here, very sharp and military, but, for god's sake, tell your men to relax."

George said, "Thank you, sir, but it's awfully hard to look military with three inches of snot hanging from your nose." That broke the old man up.

The permanent sub-zero weather began to take its toll. Zellich's bum football shoulder wouldn't allow him to function and kept him in constant pain. He was sent back to the Division hospital on November 17. I was glad to see him get to go. We exchanged addresses and he made me promise to visit him in Oregon.

That night we got a freezing rain. We had our holes covered with panchos, C-ration box cardboard and anything we could get. I had a ditch around my hole and my pup tent roof extended out far enough to stay dry throughout the night. Everyone had the tin can charcoal heater glowing. It was pretty warm but the fumes were bad. I woke up in the middle of the night with a splitting headache and sick as could be. I literally burst from that hole and we started pulling guys out of their holes, some in real bad shape. The ice had sealed all cracks and the charcoal had burned the oxygen. From then on I made sure every foxhole had a vent. There were some pretty miserable spectacles in the morning. Guys without ditches around their foxholes were soaked and frozen. A mile away the mountains were white with snow but in our valley it had only rained. Further north, five inches of snow had fallen and it was still snowing.

The guys would come up with all sorts of devices to keep warm. Some of them were dangerous. One night two guys hung

blankets around a jeep and ran a tube from the exhaust to the outside of the blankets. The next morning they were dead from monoxide poisoning.

I would lay at night and try to imagine being at home in bed or on the farm in Iowa with Carm. It was hard to imagine such luxury with your breath freezing on your sleeping bag and stones gouging you in all your tender spots. Going to the toilet was next to the worst thing that could happen to you, especially at night. You almost got frostbite while answering nature's demands.

One bug-a-boo was our shoe pacs. They were supposed to be discarded at zero degrees fahrenheit, and we were in temperatures far below that. They were made of rubber lowers and leather uppers, with heavy felt insoles that were always wet. We were beginning to get frostbite cases. We did have excellent sleeping bags, parkas, gloves and longjohns, but if your feet were frozen, you were pretty much a casualty. I had written Carm that I wished I had my five-buckle overshoes along. The guys with regular shoes in regular boots made out better. She wrote back bound and determined to send them over. For some reason I persuaded her not to.

It was getting so tough that I was deriving a sort of sadistic satisfaction in realizing how much one can stand when the chips are

down. I gained confidence, gained weight and had the appetite of a damned bear. My wind was superb. I was hard, never felt better. I could push other things out of my mind and get down to the business at hand.

We welcomed any little thing that came up as relief from the discomfort -- hot soup in the supply tent, fresh gingerbread and the like. Carm wrote faithfully every day, though some days I received nothing and others I got several letters. I remember reading one of her letters by pure cold moonlight. She sent so many snapshots I had to remove the excess cards, etc., from my billfold to carry them. I would get them all out and look at them before dark every evening. I somehow managed to keep writing nearly every day, usually from the blackout tent. I came upon another oriental sword and fastened it under the Q. M. trailer for Wade, with the other one. The Wharangs were expert scroungers. As a result I had more eggs, etc., than most people. They took care of me pretty well. So well that they were now known as "Ram's Raiders." One day I dusted myself good with flea powder and got some down there under my foreskin and, man oh man, I almost circumcised myself. Then it got scabs all over it. Some things took your mind off the cold pretty damn effectively.

I was coming up a rocky stream bed on the evening of November 19 and, lo and behold, there sat an old white hen. I thought I was dreaming. We were miles from anything and I don't know how she got clear out there. Maybe some raiding party dropped her. Anyway, I caught her and we cooked her the next day. The flavor was there but never in my life had I tasted a chicken so tough. I chewed for twenty minutes and then just gathered all my will power and swallowed it. Even so, it was a real treat.

The villagers in the area would turn to us for protection from roving bands of bandits and guerrillas. They would race in and report that there were bandits in their village, and chances were my Wharang boys would go after them. Sometimes we got there in time and sometimes not. In one village the people saw us coming and turned on the bandits, really messing them up. We had to restrain one old bird from attacking them after we had them in custody. Through the interpreter I learned he had raised a girl from babyhood for himself and the bandits had raped her, before he could fulfill his own objective. I had the interpreter ask the girl if she was hurt. She grinned and said something in Korean. "What did she say?" I asked.

He said, "She say, 'No hurt but made belly feel funny.'"

I felt for the ordinary civilian. Those poor people had been subjugated so many times in past centuries that their main objective was just to stay alive. When we would come into a town, there was usually a big decorated arch saying, "Welcome Americans." If you looked around you could find one in a junk pile that said, "Welcome--(someone else)."

Morale was amazingly high in our outfit in spite of the conditions. We had a gunnery sergeant, Lamb, who was hard to handle. He would hold reveille every morning at the top of his bullhorn voice, "Okay, let loose your cock and grab a sock," and more stuff like that. I was a jungle bunny where a sneeze, cough, fart or anything could give away your position. I couldn't stand this and told him to quiet down. From then on he did it in a whisper, which "no one could hear." I could never get through to him. One thing, though, Sergeant Lamb had the knack of doing everything right in combat. I never saw him lose the expression on his face, similar to one sitting comfortably on a toilet seat on Sunday morning in the Waldorf Astoria. I couldn't make up my mind if he was crazy, smart, dumb or brave.

Old Sergeant Clay would arise every morning, shake the snow from his parka and yell, "What time does that goddamned

dog team leave for Helsinki? I want a ticket!" We kind of adopted this and when things were grim you could always depend on someone saying, "When does the dog team leave?"

No matter how tough the going you always have your entertainers. Sometimes not the most refined, maybe, but better than none. Ours in the Third Battalion were four Tennessee hillbillies who were cooks. They were good and always happy and cheerful, even in the most anxious situations. Whenever you visited where they were working, you could expect to be entertained by their dinner music. A few verses of one of their favorites--

Oh, I dreamed last night I was crawlin' and creepin'
Into the room where my baby was a sleepin'

But I ain't gonna do it no more
I ain't gonna do it no more

In about nine days I was taken down sick
With achin' balls and a drippin' dick

And I ain't gonna do it no more
I ain't gonna do it no more

And I went to the doctor and wouldn't you know
He could save my dick but the balls must go

And I ain't gonna do it no more
I ain't gonna do it no more

(And those are just the milder parts).

We were preparing for our next mission, to pass through the Seventh Marines at Hagaru and take the east side of the Chosin. From there we would either go on to the Yalu or detour west to help the Eighth Army advance to the Yalu. Intelligence showed that the Chinese were strong in front of the Eighth Army lines. MacArthur had asked the X Corps brass to lend them a hand. We grumbled at the rumors of this potential change in course. You don't reach the Yalu by marching west.

I patroled the east side of the Chosin up far enough to see our objective, north of the water, from a distant mountain. It didn't look like there was any enemy there, at least not many. We didn't seem to be hitting much lately, which suited me just fine.

It was really beautiful country up there in the mountains, if you looked beyond our uncomfortable situation. No dirty towns like South Korea because there were hardly any towns. It was all very rugged, rocky and wild. Semi-arctic terrain. I guess I missed a wealth of pictures, turning in my camera with my clothing roll in South Korea, but I'd just felt then that I didn't a damn. Besides, I could carry only my weapons, ammo, clothes and chow, and that was plenty.

Captain Marbaugh,

I was sent to Division Hospital and they immediately suggested an operation on my shoulder. The end of the clavicle bone has to be cut off, but since they have no facilities for that type of operation, they were going to evacuate me to Japan. Now the good one--they have a list of the types of injuries that can be evacuated and my type wasn't on it. So they transferred me to Combat Service to stand by until these orders change. This Combat Service is a beach supply outfit, which is a good deal for an old man. I'm right in the middle of all people who have nearly completed their thirty.

The doctor asked me what in hell I was doing here in the first place, and when I told him what kind of physical we went through, he could hardly believe it.

Well, old boy, I hope you are not freezing your ass off too much. Tell Dr. Murphy what happened to me and for christ sakes take it easy.

Zellich

We got a break in the harsh weather on November 22. The sun was shining, a little cold and windy. The news came that the Seventh Army Division had reached the Yalu, seventy-five miles northeast of us at Hyesanjin. They hadn't run into much. It was darn good news.

Finally, we broke camp and moved out on the twenty-third, Thanksgiving Day. We rolled through Hagaru and by November 24 the Fifth Marines were pounding the ground east of the reservoir, all three battalions.

That was also D-day for the massive Eighth Army assault, 100,000 men marching for the border. Word got to us that General MacArthur was there for the jump-off and said we would be home by Christmas. That became a famous quote. It may have been a famous press misquote. His story later was he'd said he hoped to have some units home by Christmas, depending on whether the Chinese intervened.

North of the reservoir
Korea
November 25, 1950

My Darling Carm, Lyn and Wade,

The mailman was pretty good to me yesterday. Four letters from you, one from Ralph and Max, one from the County Game Warden, one from Rev. Bissell and one from Mom. Yours had the pictures of Wade and his tractor and Lyn and some animal in the park. They were really superb and I'm still looking at them.

Now for our situation. We got up here okay. We haven't run into more than fifty gooks since we left the last position. We are leaving here tomorrow and going back south and up the other side of the reservoir. Such B.S. She's really cold up here. Ten degrees below zero. This morning the frost was solid on the reservoir and around the hole in my sleeping bag.

I'd give anything to spend Christmas with you guys. If not, I know where our hearts and souls will be. You get Lyn her little bicycle and Wade something nice, too. Then get something for yourself other than you would ordinarily buy and consider it from me. Now, do that, honey. As for me, I have all I can carry, so please be sensible and send me only an extra-large letter. I'll

celebrate somehow, maybe mix my C-rations differently or something. Back where we were last, some of the boys fashioned Christmas wreaths from pine boughs and had them hanging on their foxholes.

Glad to hear you dreamed of me. I can't really remember a night that I haven't dreamed of you and the kids. It helps a lot. Hell to wake up and realize where I am, though.

Max wrote two pages and Ralph one. Rather surprised me that he wrote.

Well, my dear, I shall stop for now. I'll write next time I can but it may be from two to seven days. Bye for now, sweetheart. I love you--

Love as ever,
Ron

Hello Lyn and Wade,

How are you little squirts? Boy, it's cold and windy here. Daddy has a big fur coat and hat and rubber shoes He looks like a big Teddy Bear in them. I wish you could see him. Is it cold there, too? Well, be good and I'll see you. Hope Santa Claus finds you.

Daddy

We took the east side of the "Frozen Chosin" and were relieved by a battalion of the Seventh Army Division. We'd seen no indication of any big enemy activity up there, but we got a pretty good guerrilla attack at night. Three kids from Decatur and Monroe, Indiana, had come up to visit me, my Fort Wayne boys. They had been in the gung ho boot group in Pendleton that had slipped into the

vet group and they'd made it to Korea without detection. They'd been placed in the 4.2 Mortar Section to keep them somewhat off the lines. We visited until almost dark. I told them they'd better get back as it was unsafe to mush around after dark. Some trigger-happy leatherneck might blow your head off. But they were homesick and we talked too long and they decided to stay till morning. Then we got the guerrilla attack and things were pretty lively for a while. The next morning it took very little persuasion to get them to return.

The Seventh Marines had advanced up the west side of the Chosin. Seven miles up the mountain road from Hagaru, they had run into a couple hundred Chinese soldiers at Toktong Pass. Air strikes and artillery cleared the path. On the twenty-fifth, the Seventh seized the village of Yudam-ni, fourteen miles north of Hagaru.

Our visions of reaching the Yalu within the next few days were gutted by an order on the twenty-sixth, which we'd known was coming. We were to go back around the reservoir, up the west side to Yudam-ni, pass through the Seventh and spearhead a drive west over the road from Yudam-ni to Mupyong-ni. Going over to escort the Eighth Army to the Yalu. Their right flank, an R.O.K. outfit, was some eighty miles away. Between them and us was

a Chinese supply route, a north-south road and rail line running from Manpojin, on the Yalu, to Huichon, southwest of us. This threatened the Eighth Army's exposed right flank and our left flank. We were to seize Mupyong-ni, where the road from Yudam-ni intersected the supply route. This would interrupt the supply flow and divert the Chinese attention from the Eighth Army. From there we would turn north to the Yalu, advancing beside the Eighth Army. The road from Yudam-ni wound through fierce mountains, where enemy strength was virtually unknown. Quite a detour for those of us who were trying to get home to our families for Christmas.

That day our Second Battalion left for Yudam-ni. They would lead the attack west. Early the next morning, November 27, we saddled up again, jumped on trucks, left the upper east end of the Chosin, motored south through Hagaru, north through Toktong Pass and on up to Yudam-ni. One thing that bothered us older vets was that we kept passing unused emplacements lined with clean straw, covering the road, facing north, not south. One of my buck sergeants said to me, "Skipper, they're suckin' us up into the hills and they're gonna cut us off. You might as well get ready for it."

We drove into Yudam-ni at noon, amid gala fireworks. The Second Battalion's advance west had jumped off that morning, and they had walked smack into a Chinese surprise party--bunkers and roadblocks just outside of town. Carbines, machine guns, mortars, howitzers, and Corsairs had been raising hell with those Chinese all morning. Two companies of the Second Battalion were caught up in a real dogfight along the road. The Chinese held a slope above them and had a mountain around a bend tiered with bunkers. Southwest of Yudam-ni both Fifth and Seventh Marines were shooting it out with more Chinese. By early afternoon the advance was postponed. We would have to utilize our arriving battalions. The Second Battalion had gained only 1,500 yards.

We nestled our battalion C. P. next to a very steep hill north of the village, as protection against artillery and mortar fire. Yudam-ni was in a bowl, rimmed by mountains. I felt like a toy soldier sitting in a big box. To air observers, Yudam-ni was the hub of a five-spoke wheel. Village and valley were encircled by five hefty ridges, with five long corridors radiating out between them. These ridges had been named according to their direction

from town--north, northwest, southwest, south southeast. Our C. P. was at the foot of North Ridge.

We had our foxholes dug before dark, our defenses set for the night. We spotted many white uniforms in the mountains, everywhere I looked through the binoculars. My Korean interpreter said they were Chinese.

Still, I didn't think the general situation looked too bad. Dead Chinese were strewn over the landscape. I guessed they had thrown maybe one company at us that morning. Didn't see any heavy equipment. They hadn't used any air support--our pilots controlled the air south of the Yalu River. We had ten companies from both the Fifth and Seventh positioned in the hills around Yudam-ni and two battalions camped in the valley, us Lone Wolves and the First Battalion, Fifth, who were still arriving after dark. South of town was our artillery regiment, the Eleventh Marines. They had about fifty howitzers set up. North of town we had 75mm recoiless rifles and 4. 2 mortar companies from both regiments. We had Corsairs and a spotter plane for air support. Five truckloads of supplies had arrived from Hagaru and were being unloaded. The road

back to Hagaru was guarded by two companies of the Seventh Marines, Company C about five miles south of us and Company F further down at Toktong Pass. I would have felt a little more comfortable with another regiment along, but we were set up pretty well.

We came down to the C. P. and reported. Intelligence reports were rather negative as far as I could gather. Enemy in the area? Sure. How many and where? Negative. We had received one very disturbing report. The Chinese had launched a big attack against the Eighth Army and had brought them to an abrupt halt.

After appraising the situation, Colonel Taplett redeployed units to plug gaps around our perimeter. We had been told some Seventh Marines occupied the slope above our C. P., but no one was up there. Taplett sent a platoon from Company I to man an outpost about five hundred yards up the slope. Quite a ways beyond them was the summit of Hill 1384 on North Ridge. My Wharang Platoon dug in about two hundred yards above the C. P. They had four light machine guns, manned by marines. Our Weapons Company set up east of the C. P. in a draw that ran a couple hundred yards into the ridge. Tied in with them and forming a complete defense perimeter for the C. P. were my H & S Company, the cooks, drivers,

communications men, etc., the inner circle, so to speak.

The road was about 150 yards west of us, running northwest from Yudam-ni to a fork that formed the corridors separating the North, Northwest and Southwest Ridges. The road forked with the corridors, going on both sides of Northwest Ridge. Colonel Taplett placed H Company and the other two platoons of I Company across the fork. They backed up the Seventh Marines, Company H, who held Hill 1403, about two thousand yards from us on Northwest Ridge. It was a big bare hill that looked like the ice cream in an ice cream cone (single dip).

Directly across the road from the C. P., on the other side of the valley, Company G set up a defense at the bottom of Southwest Ridge. They backed up other companies of the Seventh Marines who held Southwest Ridge.

I took a position with some of my men west of the C. P., across the road. We settled down to the normal twenty-five per-cent alert, a quarter of us awake, the rest asleep. The seventy-five percent slept the sleep of the exhausted and the twenty-five percent counted the minutes until they could wake their relief and hit the rack.

The temperature dropped to twenty below that night. It was bitter cold. My fingers and toes were numb. I wiggled my toes as hard as I could to warm them a little inside my pacs. I had my .45 pistol in my shirt next to my skin, so it wouldn't freeze up. The moon came up, lighting everything in a very pale sort of way. It was a little bit misty on the hills. The air was charged with an uneasiness.

I took a time check--it was 8:45. As I peered at the luminous dial, I heard a rising crescendo of small arms fire to the north--and close. I couldn't quite determine who was getting it. It was the Company I platoon outpost and the Wharangs, up the hill from our C. P., receiving harassing fire. A few minutes later the west and northwest erupted. From that area the sky seemed to fill up with tracers. I knew a damn fierce battle had started and judged it to be H Company of the Seventh Marines. Hundreds of Chinese soldiers had sneaked up in tennis shoes and attacked the two companies of the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, who held our furthest positions along the road west, and minutes later hundreds battered H Company on Hill 1403. Above all the shots and explosions, I could hear the Chinese yelling, their bugles and whistles intermixed with marine shouts. That sounded pretty rough, so I passed the word for

100 percent alert and scooted across the road to the C. P.

The C. P. was a beehive of activity. I ran into Major Thomas "Bull" Durham, the battalion S-3. He informed me that Company H of the Seventh Marines indeed had been hit. Before long, some of the boys began straggling into our sector in all stages of dress, some without shoes. We took care of them in our aid station. They told us that the Chinese had gotten up to them by surprise, because no one could spot their white clothes against the snow. They said a platoon had been overrun but the others were still holding part of the hill. They had suffered terrific losses.

Major Canney came up to me and asked, "Captain Marbaugh, got your people all set?"

I told him I had.

"Stand by for a ram," he said. "The hills are alive with the little devils."

I returned across the road to my position. The firing in the hills kept up. You could hear the Chinese mortars and the marine machine guns. Out there on our western flank the Chinese overran part of F Company of the Second Battalion and regained part of a

slope that they had lost earlier in the day. At around ten o'clock the Northwest Ridge over there was ablaze.

Our artillery and mortars really poured it to the Chinese on Hill 1403, especially with white phosphorous shells. I was glad of that. W. P. puts on quite a display when it explodes at night. The Chinese wore mostly thick quilted uniforms and the white phosphorous would embed in them. The stuff just doesn't stop burning when it gets on you. Water makes it burn better. So does blood when it embeds in the flesh. The barrage gave the commander of H Company, Captain Leroy Cooke, time to regroup for an attack to restore the lost ground. Captain Cooke died leading the charge. The Chinese didn't budge.

The battles at both ends of Northwest Ridge dragged on.

Then more Chinese troops suddenly assaulted a hill on North Ridge, east of our C. P. a thousand yards. Hill 1282, manned by Company E, Seventh Marines. Waves of Chinese charged them but they cut them down and hung on. This continued for several hours. At one point the Chinese slipped between the hill and the next hill east, Hill 1240, and sniped at our two regimental headquarters down in the village.

Along about midnight small arms and automatic weapons fire opened up from our lines across the fork in the road. Very close. The Chinese were trying to slide around Hill 1403 just above the road, between Northwest Ridge and North Ridge. If they succeeded, they would have the Seventh Marines on Hill 1403 and the Fifth Marines out on the west road cut off from the rest of us. They were taking cover in huts at the bottom of the ridge. Our 75mm recoiless rifles opened up on the huts and set them afire. That lit up the area and the Chinese were sitting ducks. Our Company H boys (Third Battalion), on the line at the fork, blew them away. A while later the Chinese sent another thrust between the ridges. Captain Schrier's Company I, on H's right flank, repelled them with little trouble.

Then it was our turn. Suddenly, I heard all hell break loose up the slope above our C. P., in the area of the Company I outpost. The noise was terrific. I could hear concussion grenades, curses, screams, bugles, whistles and shouts of "Banzai!" I scooted across the road for the C. P. again.

Major Canney was there to meet me. He told me to stand by to move C. P., as the Chinese had overrun I Company's outpost and were still pushing. Five hundred yards above us! Everybody

hustled into firing positions. I thought I'd better move the aid station immediately, so I ran over there and gave the doctors, Moon and Murphy, the word to move to their alternate station.

Major Canney was also coming to the aid station when I saw him fall. I ran over and turned him over on his back. He never knew what hit him. Slug between the eyes. (I remember the flash that went through my mind--the family pictures he had shown me --his wife getting the telegram--damn! Damn Chinks up there!). I got the hell up against the hill and worked my way down to the operations tent.

By that time my South Koreans had been overrun and were down in the C. P. area. I could hear one of my marine sergeants cussing, very choice vocabulary, threatening to kill the whole bunch. Some of my machine gunners were still up there.

Everybody in the C. P. was at the base of the hill firing almost straight up and point blank. I could see the Chinese above us about seventy-five yards up, spread across the slope, pouring it down on us. There wasn't much snow on that hill and their white uniforms showed up like stars. There were a lot of foxholes up there, dug by the Seventh Marines the night before. It reminded me of box seats in a theatre. The Chinese would just slide out of one and

down into another. Those we were killing rolled right down into the C. P., unless they caught on something. In the middle of all this, there was that damn old Sergeant Lamb, firing away with his usual matter-of-fact expression.

The hail of fire coming down on us was too much. It simply drove us back, en masse. I passed our radio operator, Swede Swenson, on the radio, talking to Colonel Murray, mike in one hand and a .45 in the other. I heard him say, "Wait one, sir," and he calmly picked off a Chinese about thirty-five yards up and resumed his conversation, "What was that again, Colonel?"

We all took off across the open, fell back across the road. Every time I picked up my feet it felt like a slug hit where they just were. This accelerated my usual gait more than somewhat. I got over to my line and slipped into my foxhole. Just then a slug hit the rocks in front of me, and a splinter smacked me right under the nose. I could taste the blood running down.

Grenades were exploding right in the C. P. area now and I judged that all my people were off the hill, all that would ever get off. I told the boys to fire at the Chinese on the hill and to keep their fire above the C. P. I figured everyone in the C. P. was either out of there or dead, but there was no need to chance

killing some survivor with friendly fire.

The Chinese pulled up the hill a little and started laying the lead over on us.

The Weapons Company had held their position up in the draw to the right of the C. P. So, the Chinese started coming down a long nose on the C. P.'s left. This would flank the C. P. Besides, it led right down to the road and into our line. There were so damn many of them it looked like they might make it.

I gave the order to fix bayonets.

There wasn't anything else left to do. I figured either we'd kill every one of them that came down or we might just as well die there as to die going someplace else.

One young kid down the line said, half crying, "What in hell are we supposed to do now?"

I heard my property sergeant, Harry Clay, answer him, "You just listen to the skipper, son. This ain't his first night out." I felt pretty good about that, coming from an old pro like Clay.

The Chinese were making progress down the nose. We were clobbering them by the dozens but they still came on.

About that time one of my machine gunners came up, and Sergeant Clay moved out in the open and knocked off the front Chinese, till the boys got the gun set up at the base of the nose.

Coupled with our rifle fire that did the trick. I saw the white-clad figures falling all over the slope. Sergeant Clay hollered, "Whee, Skipper, this is a goddamned turkey shoot!" We kept the Chinese where they were. Clay later got recommended for the Silver Star for risking his ass to get that machine gun going.

In a few minutes I heard someone calling my name from behind the line. It was Lieutenant Charles Mize. He told me that he had G Company, our reserve company for that night, all set to man the line. He asked me if I had seen Colonel Taplett. Taplett! Damn! Where the hell was he? I sure didn't want to see him clobbered. I told Charlie I hadn't seen him lately. He asked me if I was game to go with him over to the C. P. to see if we could find him. I wasn't really very game but went anyway. Across that open space again. That space seemed to get bigger as time went by.

The operations tent looked like it was made of lace, there were so many holes in it. Swede Swenson was outside with his rifle. Inside were Colonel Taplett and Bull Durham, his pistol drawn. They had never left the tent! That damn Taplett had decided to stay in order to keep in radio contact with his companies. They had been in no man's land the whole time, isolated from the Weapons Company in the draw and us across the road, and with the Chinese right above them. Swede had covered from outside and Major Durham had his pistol ready, which he later discovered had been useless--it had frozen.

Colonel Taplett acted more like a party host than someone being shot at. When he saw me he said, "Well, how are you doing, boy? Looks like you did a good job!"

"I'm just wondering what I didn't do," I said, "seeing as how a few hundred of 'em are still looking down our throats!"

About that time two of G Company's platoons started moving across the road. I could see one of the platoon leaders, Lieutenant Dana Cashion. He was walking backward, talking to his men. Good old Cash. I wondered who gave him the order to move over here. They lost four men getting across. They moved right through the C. P. and started up the hill. Counterattacking! That was the

first one I had ever seen our troops pull at night. It turned out Colonel Taplett had ordered the maneuver while he was trapped in the tent. It was strategically sound. The Chinese would be looking down our necks from that hill come dawn.

As the boys started up the hill, that damn steep hill covered with enemy, a great lump came in my throat. Here were marines, I mean real marines! They marched up firing. Every step was fought for. The men joked among themselves as they went up. One kid chanted, "We never stagger. We never fear. We got Cash to volunteer!"

I heard Cash laugh and say, "Knock off the skylarking!"

The Chinese were yelling both in Chinese and English. One said over and over, "Come on, marine, fire your weapon! I don't know where you are!"

A young tenor voice answered him, "I'm coming, just give me time!"

Another Chinese shouted, "You never see San Francisco!"

"Could be," answered a marine, "but I'll have your ass in a minute!"

All the time Cashion kept talking to his men. The Chinese officers in the background kept shouting, "banzai," trying to urge their men forward. The bugles and whistles increased. The relentless pressure of Cash and his men began to tell on them. They began to pull back.

I saw Lieutenant Blackie Cahill's platoon moving up on Cahion's right flank and heard Blackie call over to Cash that he would stay there.

It took guts to go up that hill.

Finally, the Chinese broke and ran. The boys kept right on their tail. When they reached the area of the former I Company platoon outpost, they set up a line and waited for dawn.

The immediate pressure was off.